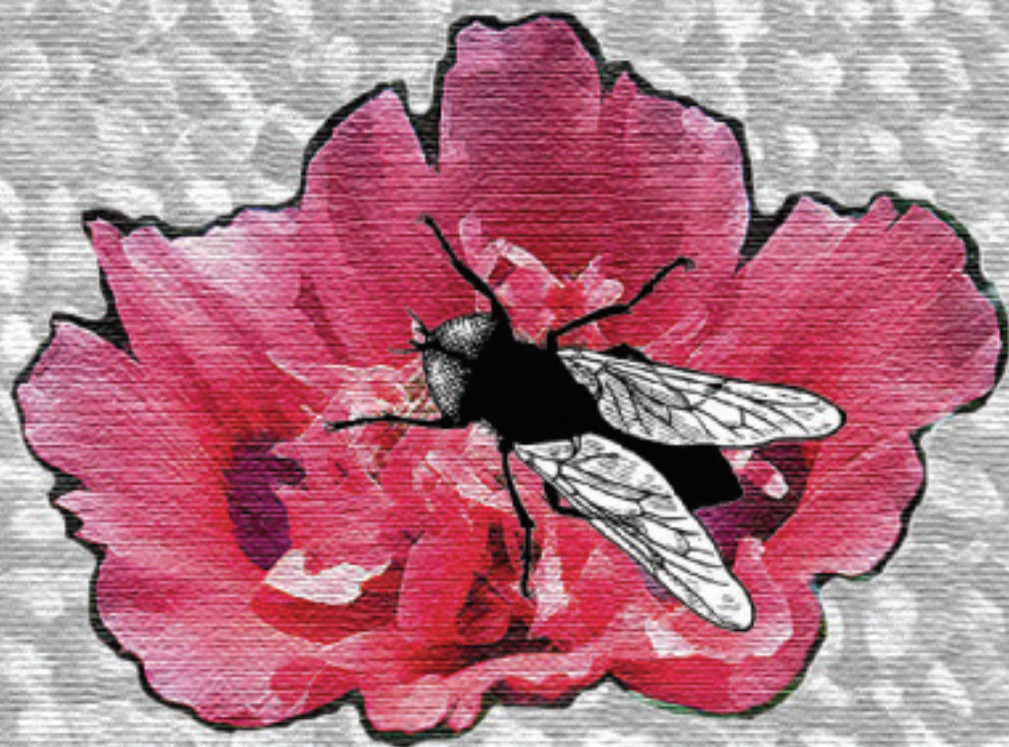


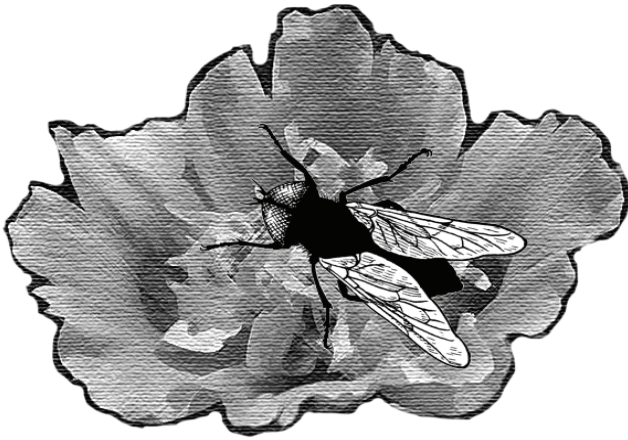
Brushstrokes of a Gadfly



E.A. Bucchianeri

Brushstrokes of a Gadfly

Free Chapter Preview



E.A. Bucchianeri

From the back cover:

“Set in New York and New Jersey during the early 1990s, *Brushstrokes of a Gadfly* reveals the story of Katherine Walsingham, the only daughter of the CEO and Chairman of Walsingham Industries, an international cosmetic and pharmaceutical company that has been in the family for generations.

Daunted by its global proportions, she has no real interest in the business other than its sentimental value. An artist by calling and temperament, a lover of literature, a philosophical idealist and animal rights activist unafraid to speak her mind, Katherine has a talent for leaping ahead with anything that seems like a good idea at the time ... often landing in hot water with her sharp tongue and allegorical paintings to the consternation and amusement of everyone around her.

Setting her heart on opening her own gallery when she graduates from an elite art college, life is good. With a trust fund to secure her, she has no real worries that are the plague of struggling artists, but soon discovers wealth does not guarantee a smooth passage in life, for all her plans do not turn out exactly as she expected.

Opening a gallery is not an easy task, and Katherine must quickly learn to balance art and business, demanding customers and harsh art critics, family tragedies and disappointments. With so much to do, romance is the last thing on her mind, and despite her best efforts to avoid any entanglements, falls in love with one of New York's most eligible bachelors. From her own reticence to become involved with anyone, to the rumours spread about his family, it is a relationship that seems doomed, but Katherine finds that love will blossom where it will and cannot be controlled or stifled, nor the joy and heartache that accompanies it.

Brushstrokes of a Gadfly is a story brimming with vibrant and entertaining characters that only New York's High Society and art circles can provide. It is a colourful and amusing novel tinged with human tragedy.

Features 1,040 pages of non-stop reading in a unique, continuous chapter format.”



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"*Brushstrokes of a Gadfly*, a wonderful, walloping novel by E.A. Bucchianeri. Katherine Walsingham is the star of *Brushstrokes*. She is beautiful, talented, intelligent, sensual, and comes from an affluent, well-bred family in New York City. Kat's only flaw is that she enjoys stirring the pot. ... What's funny is that while Kat is busy being a gadfly, the pedantry of Life wiggles in and disrupts Kat's vision for her future. Determined to eschew romantic entanglements because of their destabilizing effects, Kat unexpectedly finds herself falling in love with one of New York's most eligible bachelors. Because of a peculiar combination of circumstances – Kat's reluctance, her paramour's family, and gossip – the romance appears headed for disappointment. Whether or not Life and Love find a way won't be discussed. You'll have to read the book to find out. ...

Imagine Roberto Bolano meets Nicholas Sparks: erudite and gracious with a saccharine undertone of romance and the unpredictability of life. In other words, it's exaggerated, quaint, absurd, funny, touching, and very much like reality. E.A. Bucchianeri guides the reader through all the twists and turns of the story with remarkable aplomb ... it has everything you're looking for: humour, love, human interrelations, good writing, a plot that moves along, and emotional catharsis."

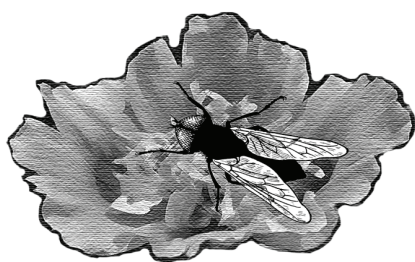
~ Randall Radic, Blogcritics.org

For my nieces

Gabriella and Josephina,

Make your lives a masterpiece,
you only get one canvas.

**Brushstrokes
of a
Gadfly**



“Katherine Walsingham”

Katherine’s heart skipped a beat when she heard her name echo over the loudspeakers, finally it was her turn to go onstage to receive her degree. At last! Springing from her seat, gingerly sidling past those seated next to her, trying not to crunch anyone’s toes, she sprightly made her way up the main isle, ascended the stairs, and walked across the stage to the podium. Shaking the hand of the President and receiving her hard earned credential in the other, she courteously thanked the giver, paused briefly for the cameras with a demure smile, turned and glided past all the robed dignitaries of the college, the Vice President, the Deans, the trustees, professors and distinguished guests. Returning to her place with her fellow graduates, she settled back into her red velvet seat, breathing a sigh of relief: “I survived!”

She turned to look up at her family seated in the balcony, waving the degree she held in her hand with a triumphant smile. Her father proudly beamed down at his daughter, while her mother, returning the wave, blew her a kiss, and Katherine reached up to ‘catch’ it before sending one back. How proud and happy Pops looks today, she thought. Dressed in a navy suit, his brown hair starting to grey at the temples, and in her estimation, a very handsome and distinguished man. Of course, Mom, in her quiet elegance, perfect as always, her soft blonde hair artfully styled with an ornamental clip, dressed in the deep rose suit they had painstakingly selected at their favourite boutique on Fifth Avenue two weeks earlier while picking out her own graduation ensemble, a sky blue two piece suit trimmed with a beaded collar. “Perfect with your blue eyes,” her mother had decided. To Pop’s left sat good old Gramps dressed in steel grey, what a contrast with his gleaming white hair. Although not a lip reader, she could just distinguish the words “That’s my girl!” aimed at her. Beside her mother sat the hopeful scientific genius of the family, her ‘little’ brother Steven, or ‘Steves’ as she always called him, two years her junior, a younger image of Pops with dark brown hair and eyes, looking elegant in his black Armani suit. How it must have pained him to relinquish his favourite blue jeans and polo shirts for the day! Forever the joker, Steves waved back, tilted his head sideways and goofily crossed his eyes. Katherine tried to suppress a grin as she watched her mother turn and quietly chide him to behave. That was Steves, you would never know that he was top of his chemistry class at MIT, a Nobel Laureate in the making, he could manipulate computer language with wizard-like dexterity, and prattle off information and statistics ala Mr. Spock. She quickly flashed him the Vulcan ‘live long and prosper’ sign, before she turned around to watch the last of the students receive their certificates.

Now, finally a Master graduate of the Belvedere College of Arts and Humanities, a private institution with a thousand or so students, the old childhood

sing-song rhyme came to mind: "No more teachers, no more books! No more teachers' dirty looks!" Well, the book part she enjoyed, she was a bookworm after all, an avid information seeker revelling in the world of art and literature. She was tempted to major in English and perhaps take a few courses in journalism, but finally chose the world of sketching pencils, acrylics and oils. She preferred the quiet solitary atmosphere, to create in her own world of paint and colour, the thrill of anticipating how her works would turn out as she eyed the blank sheets of paper or canvas before starting her next masterpiece. How satisfying it was to mess around in paint gear, without having to worry about spills, starch or frills, that was the life! When the work was finished, to see an image that had lain quiescent in her imagination as a lovely dream captured for all posterity on canvas. It was almost too unreal to imagine she had spent half a decade of her life studying at college, it only seemed like yesterday she was a timid freshman awestruck by the venerable ivy-laced establishment with its neo-Gothic campus, gate tower, halls and arches, and now, the moment was fast approaching when the President would finally announce the winner of this year's coveted Sirrac Prize, a competition open to the Master students of Belvedere. She waited with baited breath as Jonathan Xavier received his degree, there were no 'Ys' or 'Zs' on the list of students this year as far as she could remember, so any minute now!

"You may now applaud the new graduates of 1990!" the President announced, a command quickly obeyed as the visitors were only too eager to show their appreciation to their loved ones, for they knew full well the dedication and hard work that went into achieving their degree and to finally arrive at this auspicious day.

"And now, it is my privilege to announce the winner of this year's Sirrac Prize, and those who have received an honourable mention. The lucky student will have their work displayed in the exclusive Sirrac Gallery on Fifth Avenue."

A hushed, but excited murmur was audible from the students, for they knew this was a spectacular break, a springboard that could provide them instant access to the art patrons of New York, perhaps the world. Practically every Sirrac winner they knew or heard about had received new commissions and opportunities to present their future works in other fashionable galleries.

"As you are aware, the theme for this year's contest is 'Mankind and its Achievements'. The choice of medium was left open to the entrants, within reason of course."

Everyone burst into laughter, the story of the *Iron Vesuvius* was a legend at the college. A very ambitious student interested in theatre design chose to construct an elaborate volcano sculpture complete with gas flames for the particular theme that year, 'The Element of Fire', and caused an explosion that nearly cost the college its auditorium.

The Vice President handed a sealed envelop to the President. Silence descended as everyone held their breath and listened to the ripping of the paper, watching his hand extract the card that would reveal who had been granted this prized introduction to the art world. A slight pause, and finally the announcement ...

“*A Giant Leap* by Anna Millbank!”

Listening to the rousing applause, Katherine’s heart sank, a wrenching reversal of emotion after the adrenaline surge of the day. Totally deflated, “I didn’t win,” she thought. Disappointment surged through her as she applauded the winning entry. She watched the two professors wheel a platform onstage from the wings upon which stood a sculpture about three feet long and one and a half feet high veiled under a white canvas. The President removed the covering to display this latest *magnum opus* to the audience. Well, Katherine had to admit, it was an interesting piece, if you believed that theory. It featured a three dimensional rendering of the iconic progression of human evolution, a procession of figures from the ape to the primitive Neanderthals until the procession reached the age of modern man, gradually ascending a rocky outcrop to the precipice of a cliff; the final figure, a graceful Grecian youth poised nude on the very edge, his right foot just touching the cliff, his arms outstretched towards the sky prepared to take flight, the image of Mercury without the brimmed hat and winged sandals. The leaping demigod held a small figure of a space shuttle in his right hand. As far as Katherine could tell, the piece was sculptured from a plaster block and then varnished with clear enamel giving it a shiny protective covering. She had to concede the delicate figures were well executed. The President stepped aside as Mr. Joseph Sirrac came forward to read the results and comments of the judges explaining the reason for their choice, a long-winded list of the work’s merits, *vis* its graceful style, the originality of the subject, and the optimistic symbolism it represented. The cameras flashed as the artist rose from her seat and walked to the stage to receive the certificate and have her picture taken with Mr. Sirrac, the President and the prize-winning artwork. When Anna had resumed her seat amidst a new peal of cheers and applause, the President waited until the hubbub died down and *A Giant Leap* was awkwardly rolled to the other side of the stage. A fresh round of applause before the President continued, and finally the auditorium grew quiet again as the second envelope was passed.

“Now, it is time for the honourable mentions. This year, the Sirrac judges have chosen two works. The first honourable mention goes to ... Dennis Harrington for his oil painting *Electrovision!*”

Again, two professors brought in an easel upon which they placed the canvas, while a larger image was projected on a screen overhead. Is that a painting, or a Techie portrayal of a psychedelic acid trip? Mr. Sirrac proceeded to

read the judges' opinions on this entry, lauding its boldness, its modern futuristic style that captured the energy of this new era. Dennis gave a whoop of victory as he bounded up to the front. Although he did not win, an honourable mention from the Sirrac Galley was also a welcome bonus as it was a known fact that art reporters from several of the New York papers attended the graduation ceremonies at Belvedere to catch the first 'scoop' on who had won the contest. Possibly the runners up would be mentioned in the culture and art columns the next day, and perhaps, attract the attention of other galleries. To the plastic art students, this would be akin to receiving an Oscar nomination.

Dennis approached to receive his certificate, Katherine studied the painting, from the orange swirls, red jagged lines and purple blobs, with difficulty, she could detect the outline of a television, a keyboard with a monitor, a cell phone, microchips and wires. Obviously an animated abstract tribute to the dawn of the electronic age of computers, widgets and gizmos. Well, one cannot account for other people's tastes, Katherine mused, but where is the skill? Sure, anyone could slap paint around with a palette knife and call it high art! It is amazing to think that productions like this actually became accepted as high art. At least she could recognise some objects in Dennis' picture. He might make a name for himself if he continues in this style. Generally, she could not understand the praise lavished on the vast majority of modern art and the astronomical prices that it commanded on the world market. It was all false hype, Katherine had concluded long ago. How could intelligent, well educated people attend abstract art exhibitions and stand around for hours at a time voicing their self-proclaimed sophisticated interpretations of a piece and listen attentively to each other, while blithely sipping champagne and nibbling *hors d'œuvres* or petit fours, when there was nothing to interpret? A measly circle here, a paltry line there, a canvas with a dirty smear on it, and they could envision a new world unfolding before them. It was obviously a pandemic case of wilful delusion, the modern art patrons had fallen victim to an overwhelming fear of being excluded from the 'fashionable set'. They had allowed themselves to be persuaded it was the 'in thing' to attend these exhibitions, to be able to say they were there, that they hobnobbed in the most exclusive art circles, proudly affirming they too were cultured and could appreciate the New Age of expression. They lived off each other's hypocrisy, fuelling a worthless market of trash. Now, take the French Impressionists, their work is truly admirable. Renoir, Degas, Manet and Monet, their paintings victoriously stood the test of time. They had perfected the art of capturing the effects of light with their revolutionary natural style, and their unfettered passion for displaying nuances.

"The second honourable mention goes to ... Katherine Walsingham for her oil painting, *Le Sacre d'ingéniosité Humaine!*"

At the sound of her name and the round of applause, her mind snapped back from its ruminating reverie. Although she truly had hoped to win, she watched with mixed feelings of exhilaration and apprehension as the professors brought a second easel onstage and revealed her piece to the auditorium. She eyed her creation basking in the golden glow of the spotlights. Judging from the raised eyebrows, the disgruntled wry faces of the professors and the lively murmuring in the auditorium ranging from sounds of amusement to incredulity, it is a wonder they gave it an honourable mention at all, she decided wistfully. What did the judges have to say about her bold allegorical remake of Jacques-Louis David's monolithic mural? Mr. Sirrac read out the comments of the judges, praising the craftsmanship of the composition, yet diplomatically guarding their compliments of her biting allegory, graciously declaring her piece was a reminder that mankind has a great responsibility to use knowledge and discoveries with wisdom and prudence.

Recalling her first inspirations for the Sirrac contest, Katherine realized at that time she had never seriously considered man's achievements in any great depth, taking her modern lifestyle for granted despite the flaws and imperfections that were evident in the world and society around her. Yet, when probing the theme set for the contest that year, she had to admit much of what could have been accomplished for the benefit of mankind had turned sour. The ambitious lust for power and monetary rewards manipulated many good intentions, therefore, man's greatest 'achievements' were often recipes for future disasters. The human race has always fallen short of its high ideals, the weaker element will take what is good and progressive, and for their own selfish purpose, turn it to evil. What a pity, so many opportunities to achieve true greatness were lost, she concluded. Curiously, an image of David's work came to mind, *Le Sacre de Napoléon*, known to the English-speaking world as *The Coronation of Napoléon*. Set in the cathedral of Notre-Dame, the Emperor magnanimously crowns the kneeling Empress, while Pope Pius VII, seated behind the man of destiny, gives his papal blessing to the proceedings. In the background sits Napoléon's mother, a touching element of artistic licence as she did not attend the ceremony, but Napoléon was pleased when David had thought to include her. What had brought this particular mural to mind? Could it be that book from the Louvre she had been browsing through? Initially, Katherine could not perceive any connection between the triumphant scene and her cynical observations. Was her subconscious prompting an inspiration? Musing on the subject, she thought, didn't Napoléon crown himself? Well wasn't that a bold action!

Intrigued by this arrogant audacity, she decided a trip to the library was in order, and discovered David originally considered painting Napoléon crowning himself, but decided that image may be too egotistical and would display the

Emperor in a bad light ...but it's perfect for my theme, Katherine decided. If Hogarth could satirise the men of his day and be recognised as a genius, why can't I? She thought her idea had possibilities, and hoped it would be original. At least she would graduate with a bang! She could visualise the characters in the new roles she would assign them. She would paint Napoléon as an allegory of man's achievements, pompously holding the crown over his head, his royal mantle copiously embroidered with yellow and black radiation symbols to represent the advent of the nuclear age. The Empress, Josephine, shall also be standing erect crowning herself, no humility there! A nice touch representing woman's equality and her supposed new-found freedoms. Women can be educated, vote, have a career, have it all ... but for sure, we lost respect somewhere along the line, and we never achieved true equality, so, leave her where she stands, a few steps below the Emperor. Now, what can we do with Napoléon's mother? Well, isn't pride the mother of all misfortune? Pride, as an allegorical figure, must be young and beautiful, and she shall not have attendants, Pride always stands alone. Let us give her Icarus' wings to remind us of his fall, and in case this symbolism is lost on the viewer, the words 'Mater Superbia' should be painted on a sash draped across her breast like a badge of honour. The Minister *for* War in the foreground shall be leaning against the miniature replica of a cruise missile, the Arch Chancellor Prince of the Empire, Minister of Justice, shall be sleeping in a chair holding broken scales and a bulging brown envelope. Hmm, the rest of the royal entourage gathered around the central figures should all be decked out in currency symbols, the Dollar, the British sterling, the Deutschmark, the Franc, the yen, the rouble. Now, who shall deliver the blessing? A pope would never approve this travesty of humanity. Who should replace him in this scene? Of course! The new figure seated behind 'Napoléon' should have a red cloak and doublet embroidered in gold, a black hat with a few cockerel and raven feathers, he must be painted with red skin and use his left hand. With an icy sneer, the Father of Lies gives his approval to this epoch of industrial and technological 'advancement'. Man, crowning himself as the god of this new age. Well, the crucifix will have to be replaced with a detail more suited to this travesty, the Tree of Knowledge would be a nice touch with the crafty serpent hanging from its boughs. The bishops will have to be replaced ... ah yes, men in black suits with large briefcases brimming with bureaucracy, and a steel drum to represent our crude dependence on oil and the barons who pump it. Perhaps the royal insignia on that banner in the background to the left should be changed, a skull to symbolise death? Or better still, Gilbert's famous optical illusion with the lady looking in the mirror to show the vanity of it all. I hope David will forgive the liberty I took with his masterpiece, I'll just leave him scratching his head in confusion where he placed himself above Napoléon's mother. It was a pity she would have to be content

painting this great satire on a smaller scale than the original, but then again, five hundred square feet of canvas would be a little over the top, and never get finished in time.

Receiving her certificate of merit and posing with Mr. Sirrac, the President and the college dignitaries for the traditional photographs, Katherine could sense the atmosphere had chilled somewhat onstage. The President stood stiff looking down at his shoes, the Vice President and Deans shuffled back and forth on their feet uncomfortably, the professors gritting their teeth in a strained smile. She knew her subject may be considered contentious, but was not quite prepared for this frigid reception. Was it really *that* bad? One would assume they were accustomed to seeing wild, *avant garde* artworks issuing from exuberant paintbrushes by now. Perhaps they had expected me to paint a generic, trite, or optimistic scene. Did they forget they were the ones who taught us that the unexpected and the controversial are remembered, or hailed as milestones in creative expression? Her thoughts turned to the other entrants, and she contrasted the situation. They were uncomfortable with *her* piece, but could approve a statue glorifying the alleged animal origins of humanity, which was still a hypothesis and could never be proved to her satisfaction. The Evolution Theory was certainly a divisive theme, or where could they see the talent in liberal applications of paint encrusted on a canvas like rainbow-hued soap scum?

Returning to her seat, she mused about this disturbing polarity, but not for long, consoled by the thought ... it did not matter. From this point on, she could paint what she liked without having to win anyone's approval. It was a rude experience to suffer the critical evaluation of works that she considered good, if not great. Her days of trying to accomplish what the professors expected and the stress of wondering if 'this' or 'that' will receive a good grade were behind her.

After the President delivered his last congratulatory speech to the graduates, he made the announcements explaining where the contestants were to collect their entries, and the exact location of the official photographers in the main campus quadrangle for formal portraits, the ceremony concluded with cheers, laughter and light-hearted babble. Wondering if she should meet her family or collect her piece first, she decided that the middle path was best and motioned them to come down before edging her way up to the stage. She did not get far before her friend, Susanna Cooper, pushed through the milling crowd and eagerly greeted her.

"Well done!" Susanna commented, hugging her tightly, "I'm glad they gave you an honourable mention, your painting should have won."

"Thanks! Never mind, just wait until we get our own gallery started, then we get to pick the contest winners."

Awarded her place at the college through a scholarship, Susanna had

arrived from Iowa and matriculated one year after her. They just happened to meet at the library, Susanna was having trouble learning how to use the catalogue computers when Katherine came to the rescue, explaining she had the misfortune to pick a perpetually glitched computer nicknamed ‘Blunder Bolts’, which nobody bothered to fix. Learning they both majored in art, a lively conversation ensued. They discovered they appreciated the same artistic styles and shared a love of musical theatre, they had much in common, it was not long before they became fast friends. Katherine learned firsthand the difficulties of a scholarship student from Susanna. Although her tuition fees were taken care of, Susanna found it a challenge to earn enough to keep up with the living expenses and the dorm fees of her new elite surroundings with her summer job in her hometown library. Her father was a high school principal, her mother a paralegal in a law office, and while her parents helped as much as possible, it was never enough for they also had twin sons already in college, and a younger daughter with just one year left to finish high school.

In contrast, Katherine hailed from a wealthy family, the Walsingham cosmetic and pharmaceutical empire to be exact, and never had to worry about tuition fees, in fact, money was never an issue for her. Gramps had already presented her and Steves with an enormous trust fund worth several million when they had turned eighteen—“I want to see them enjoy my gift to them while I’m still here and kicking!” he declared to their sceptical parents, further explaining this would be good training and teach them how to manage money — therefore starting a career was not a necessity as she could live very well off the interest she received from her investments.

Despite her independence, she was not a spoiled darling. An issue of an industrious family, she could just picture her father’s eyebrows disappearing into his hairline if she aimlessly whiled away her days playing tennis, attending endless lunches at the club, or foolishly shopping and accumulating stupid articles she really did not want or need. In any case, she could not imagine living that lifestyle. Surely, the world had more fulfilling goals to offer than that! Following a period of self-reflection, she knew she needed to channel her energies into something constructive, something *creative*. It was at this time she began to explore various career options that appealed to her. At one point, she toyed with the idea of becoming an architect, but talking it over with Steves, she realized this would be too technical and confining. Just thinking about the advanced mathematics and physics she would have to master was enough discouragement, definitely not a career for someone who hated to balance a chequebook. In the end, it may prove to be a dreary occupation, battling planning commissions, budgets, deadlines, and all the bureaucracy involved. Interior design had come to mind, but then, that would mean pleasing very demanding clients, restricting her own creative ability.

She had displayed a unique talent for the plastic arts in high school, so developing her skills became the logical choice, and if all went well, she was fortunate to have the finance necessary to design and open up her own art gallery with the freedom to display her own pieces and the work of artists that she appreciated.

Although Susanna did not discuss her difficulties, Katherine could see that not everyone had the luxury of arranging their life as she could. Pondering on what she could do to help her friend, she stumbled upon a brilliant plan, namely the spacious three bedroom apartment with the veranda over the garage that in times past served as the residence for the chauffeur and his family. As long as she could remember, her grandfather, father and mother had preferred to drive themselves, and therefore the place had been vacant for years until she decided to turn the living room into her private studio away from the main house. The carpet was old and she could work away to her heart's content without occasioning numerous sighs and pleadings from her mother not to spill paint all over the floor. I know the place needs fixing up, but why couldn't Susanna stay there? I hope Pop will think it's a good idea, she could save the money she would normally have to spend on the boarding fees for the Belvedere dorms. Of course, Susanna would have to commute to college everyday, I hope her clunker can hold out, or we could car-pool Katherine was excited with this new plan, for this would give them an opportunity to spend more time together working on their projects. Not knowing how her parents would react to this idea, it took her a few days to think it over before she approached them with her proposal during dinner one evening. She was delighted when they agreed that Susanna could stay as long as she wished, but the interior of the apartment was in no fit condition for occupancy—it had been idle for years. Obviously, it would need repairs and a paint job, undoubtedly the kitchen and bathroom were in dire need of improvement. Susanna was the perfect excuse the family needed to refurbish that area of the property they had not used for an age, and it would have become a necessary repair job eventually. Elated with her parents' approval, Katherine explained Susanna may need a reasonable place to live, but was fiercely independent and would not accept her offer if it looked like charity, especially if she thought they had renovated the place on her account. Her father suggested that if Susanna felt she had to contribute, she could pay half the utilities of the apartment, and he hoped she would find this acceptable.

"After we fix it up, just let her know that the place had been neglected for far too long, it had become a convenient storage area until you used the living room for your artwork, and we thought it would be practical to have someone actually living there rather than let it go to wreak and ruin again. Tell her she would be doing us a favour by looking after the place, which is the truth. I am sure she wouldn't object to this arrangement," her father suggested as he sipped

his after dinner coffee.

Katherine could not wait to tell Susanna the good news of her parents' 'plan' to restore the old apartment, that they really wished they had a long term occupant to keep an eye on it, and it was perfect for her artwork, if she wouldn't mind moving in and contribute towards the utilities. Under these conditions, Susanna was happy to accept. It took six weeks for the workmen to rip out the old fixtures, replacing them with the latest models, and when the painters and interior decorators had finished the apartment, Susanna moved into the Walsingham Estate, 3 Oak Meadows, Englewood, New Jersey and became an adopted member of the family.

"I am sorry you couldn't attend the graduation ceremony Suzy, but at least you'll have your own next year." Due to the small dimensions of the college theatre cum auditorium, guests of the graduates were restricted to four family members or friends.

"Me too, but at least I'm here for the end. Come on, let's see the degree."

Katherine unrolled her scroll displaying a long declaration in Latin affixed with a red seal proclaiming her a Master of Art.

"Imagine working for years to obtain a piece of paper we can hardly read," Katherine joked.

"And to officially declare you have talent," Suzy returned.

"Amen! Well, let's go up and take one last look at the pariah canvas in all its infamous splendour before I have to take it down, and let this be a warning: beware of what you paint for the Sirrac Prize this coming year."

Suzy chuckled in disbelief, "It really is ridiculous, your painting is brilliant, and the only reason they passed you over, it obviously struck a nerve too close to home."

"Humph! I guess nobody likes to be reminded of the truth, even though the world badly needs it now and then. Isn't it strange how people are selective about the truth they want to see or hear? I mean, an artist or photographer depicts the countless famines in Africa, or the massacre in Tiananmen Square, and they are hailed as heroes for bringing the world's attention to troubled areas, which is fine, but, just try and point out where the true problem lies, destructive egotism, greed, intolerance, human fallibility, and every other fault of mankind, and people bristle," Katherine mused.

"Sure sounds like everyone wants to treat the symptoms, not eradicate the disease, and we end up with more problems," Suzy replied, "Well, if we can't obliterate the disasters of the earth, at least we can expose them through our art, and perhaps get people to think, it's better than doing nothing."

"I agree. Let's always try to paint the truth," Katherine declared, "our art must be made to mean something."

“You bet your sable paintbrushes. I refuse to portray anything else,” Suzy concluded. There and then, the girls embarked on a private crusade. Stopping to survey the other entries, they chatted with a group of graduates who had come to the stage for a closer look before Katherine turned to the side door leading backstage.

“Well, I had better go and retrieve the painting, everyone should be down in a minute or two, and then we have the photographs to take care of.”

“Do you need some help with it? I think it will fit in my car if I lower the back seat. I can drop it back at the house, I have to go there anyway and finish some packing before I get ready for the dinner tonight. It looks like you might be here for a while depending on how long the photographers take, and you don’t need to drag a canvas all afternoon.”

“Thanks Suzy, I’d appreciate that. I should be out in a jiffy.”

Katherine went through the side door with a small group of crestfallen entrants who had not received an honourable mention, and she tried to graciously accept their best wishes without appearing too cheerful and pouring salt on their wounded feelings. As two volunteer professors returned their works, Katherine was approached and quietly taken aside by a robed figure who had stayed behind to converse with a few dignitaries still milling around in the backstage area.

“I believe congratulations are in order, Miss Walsingham. Well, I can see why you kept your entry a secret and refused any help,” chuckled Professor Matthews in his ‘Mr. Chips’ tone as he pushed his gold-rimmed glasses up the bridge of his nose. “A David cum Hogarth hybrid, with quite an unusual twist. I believe you did not want to go softly into that good night ... planned to graduate in a blaze of controversial glory?”

Katherine grinned.

“Thank you, Professor. I wanted my work to say something important, but obviously my statement was judged to be over the top.”

No beating about the bush, that was Professor Matthews, her favourite instructor in the Art department. A man in his sixties, grey hair, down to earth, candid with a dash of elegant humour, he was an easy-going teacher and his classes a pure joy to attend. He never made a student feel uncomfortable and incompetent in front of others when they found a point difficult to understand, how to master a certain blending of colours or had trouble portraying the right perspective. If a student displayed a unique style of their own, they were encouraged, or if they needed assistance, he was ever patient, explaining information in ways they could quickly grasp with a joke or an amusing quotation drawn from masters of the past or the ancient classics. His field of study centred on the French painters from the Neoclassical, Romantic and Impressionist schools, Katherine’s favourite styles, and therefore she was fortunate when he was assigned

to be her supervisor. She was going to miss working with him, and felt guilty for not including him while her entry was a work in progress. Just once, she wanted to try a piece on her own without relying on the expertise of her tutor.

“Yes, I must admit they were my main sources of inspiration. I almost regret I displayed this satirical subject, but at the same time, I’m glad I did. Somehow, I don’t think I could have painted anything else. Once the idea got lodged in my head, it took on a life of its own, I had to run with it, it wouldn’t let go.”

“You have great courage. I am pleased you succeeded in offending their sensibilities, an artist should paint from the heart, and not always what people expect. Predictability often leads to the duller work, in my opinion, and we have been bored stiff long enough I think. If Delacroix was anxious about portraying what people thought, rather than his inspirations and emotions, his *Liberty Leading the People* would have remained obscure in an attic somewhere in France and would not be hanging in the Louvre as a cherished national treasure.”

“Well, I wouldn’t presume to be ranked with Delacroix,” Katherine replied modestly to this lofty statement, “but I appreciate your comment. Hopefully, one day I will.”

“If you continue painting in this vein, I believe you will become a Delacroix or a David of the modern day. You don’t believe me? Then listen when I tell you I overheard the judges declare they would have chosen you first.”

“But, if they thought that, why didn’t they?” Katherine stammered, astonished at this unexpected news.

“Because, while your painting is brilliantly executed and technically flawless, it also wounds, for truth is not always beautiful, and they decided to ‘chastise’ you for their own feelings of discomfort. Remember that despite its iconic imagery and energy, *Liberty Leading the People* was originally decried for its frank portrayal of the 1830 Revolution, that the freedom fighters of the barricades were little more than scavenging bandits, the figure of Liberty looked like a dirty bare-breasted street tramp leading a mob bent on destroying decency and propriety. Nevertheless, in flamboyant brushstrokes, he displayed a sincere, if artful, patriotic message to spectators, and was remembered. Your picture, like Delacroix’s, shall not be forgotten by the judges, nor anyone else who sees it, let me assure you.”

“I really don’t know what to say, except you have confirmed my latest resolution never to paint anything that is not sincere or truthful. But,” Katherine continued, musing aloud, “what did they find ‘wrong’ with my painting, or what excuse could they give to explain their decision?”

“Oh, I believe it was on grounds of, shall we say, too much reliance on David’s masterpiece ... ?”, the Professor replied with amused hesitation.

“In other words, lack of originality,” Katherine interpreted, not a little chagrined with this pretext. “Well that’s rich, isn’t it? Everyone knows there is no such thing as true originality! Everyone is either influenced or inspired by something else ... Anna Millbank’s sculpture can’t be declared ‘unique’, everyone can see her idea sprang right out of the first scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.”

“Indeed! But, do not let this initial outcome of the contest upset you, remember what I said about predictability. Her work is accepted for the moment, for it follows the current scientific *zeitgeist* of the day that has been drummed into the mass psyche by the modern media, and therefore it is what people expect. However, I predict, in a short time it will become no more than an attractive lobby piece for a natural history museum, and eventually passed by simply because of its familiarity. Yours, while it addresses modern issues, blazes its own trail, and progresses beyond the expected and rouses the mind from its complacent torpor rather than confirm it in its set path.”

“I will remember what you’ve said. I guess this is my last lesson at Belvedere,” Katherine replied with a smile.

“I suppose so. My last bit of sage wisdom before you venture out into the big wide world. Well, are you all set for your trip to Paris? You were there before as an exchange student at the Sorbonne during your junior year, if I remember right.”

“Yes, that was a wonderful time! I’ll be home for the summer until about mid September, and then spend the next four months there, this time I’ll be staying at a friend’s apartment, a friend of my father. I want to study my favourite paintings at leisure, it was difficult to remain disciplined and attend all the lectures required at the Sorbonne rather than spend every day in the museums.”

“Not to mention the tourist attractions, the restaurants, coffee and pastry shops, and the shopping areas, I gather?” the Professor finished with a smile.

“That too! Paris is a different world, you have to live there to truly experience it properly. But I do plan to complete some works that have been in the back of my mind for some time, and this vacation period is exactly what I need. Who knows what I can develop with all that freedom and breathing the atmosphere of Paris?”

“Who knows indeed! I am happy for you. Any other future plans?”

“I would love to open a gallery sometime in the future, but I will have to assemble a collection first, and also do some research into the business end of a venture like that. A gallery is a wonderful idea, but I must also think of the practicalities. So far, all I know is that a gallery may be eligible for tax incentives, and that unless a gallery charges artists at least thirty to thirty-five percent commission, it will inevitably go broke, which means pricing is important as works do not sell everyday, unless you have a sought-after artist on show in your

establishment. However, all that is in the future, we have to wait and see how my plans work out.”

“I am expecting great things from you Katherine, and I will be keeping a watchful eye on you. And remember, stay in touch.”

“I will, you can count on that. You will be top of my guest list for the grand opening.”

“I shall await your invitation. I must leave you now, duty calls.”

Katherine returned to the auditorium with her painting in tow and joined her family who patiently waited in the centre isle for her to emerge from the backstage area.

“Well, well, Kathy. Congratulations on your honourable mention. Now I understand why you did not reveal your painting to us before you entered it for the contest,” her father declared with a chuckle, “I detect the activist returning with a vengeance.”

He could not forget her early teens, her days of placards and protesting, beginning with ‘Save the Wales’ to that day she decided that animal testing was beyond the pale and picketed their own cosmetic boutiques in the city, attracting a swarm of reporters in the process. How he had fumed back then when she cost the family business a small fortune! In this unexpected glare of public notoriety, he was eventually compelled to phase out live animal testing in their cosmetic labs and forced to adopt acceptable methods, but could now look back and smile at her heroic campaigns.

“Perhaps you could have been a little more discreet?”

“Harold dear, leave Kathy alone,” her mother interjected as she reached forward to tidy a strand of Katherine’s brown hair that had come loose. “It is a wonderful painting. A little unusual perhaps, but the colours are beautiful, and it is certainly much better than the ghastly display at the last art exhibition for the Heart Foundation. What a truly tedious event that was.”

“At least you didn’t paint Adolf Hitler crowning himself, now *that* would have made their day,” impish Steves snickered.

“You certainly did surprise them, Katie my girl,” Gramps added with a twinkle in his eye, “but I guess we had better get a move on, we have the photographs to do, and my old knee won’t brook dallying around for long.”

“I’ll take that,” Suzy said as she carefully took the canvas from Katherine. “The dinner’s at seven, right?”

“Yes, at the ‘C’est la Vie’.”

“All right, see you there.”

Leaving the auditorium, Suzy made her way to the parking lot, while the family waited for their turn with the photographers in the quadrangle.

The 'C'est la Vie' was one of Katherine's favourite French restaurants, a comfortable semi-formal multi-roomed establishment decorated in a *belle époque* Parisian theme with inviting alcoves. Tonight, they would be seated in the main dining room as the party would be too large for one of the more intimate booths. Ever the punctual businessman, Harold Walsingham made sure they arrived in time to greet the guests invited to share this special occasion but were unable to attend the graduation ceremony during the day. While they waited for the rest of their party to arrive, they chatted in the cocktail lounge. His younger brother Timothy, his wife Barbara, and their three children Jon, Stephanie and William, were the first to make their appearance. Timothy was not tall like his brother, and his hair was much lighter, still, the family resemblance was unmistakable. His ever-ready smile lighting up his face, he greeted everyone jovially, looking quite dapper in his navy sports jacket and grey slacks complete with cravat, while tall and slender aunt Barbara looked charming in her red floral patterned skirt and jacket that perfectly showed off her long wavy brown hair and hazel eyes. Jon, blonde and blue-eyed, as always looking well turned out, like Steves, he had a passion for Armani suits when dressing for an occasion. Stephanie, however, was clad under sufferance this night, Katherine noticed. Blonde like her brother, she was elegant in her cream pantsuit, but she preferred casual wear and obviously missed her jeans and tennis shoes. Quiet, brown haired William was looking handsome in his navy suit, always calm, reflective and steady as a rock, formalities and the business of life never seemed to ruffle him an iota.

Aunt Martha arrives in her usual flurry, her mother's older busybody sister, a curly grey haired plump lady of medium build dressed in a beautiful lilac skirt and jacket, with her ever over abundant festoons of gold and gems. A widow of ten years for Uncle Bob had unexpectedly died of a heart attack in Florida while marlin fishing, and having no children of their own, she busied herself with all the activities of the family. Suzy arrived just behind her, dressed in a lovely white and pink silk dress, her medium length light brown hair neatly held back with matching clips. The family lawyer Edmund Kraylor and his wife Sylvia were detained in Washington on business, so they could not be present, however, their six foot one auburn-haired son, Charles, arrived dressed in a sombre black suit and conveyed his parents' apologies to Katherine and her parents. Steves had also brought his latest girlfriend, Jennifer Davis, a flighty red-headed wisp Katherine thought, how long will this one last? When all the greetings and well wishes died down, the party were finally seated and her father proceeded to order the white wine for the appetizer, and the red wine to be served with the main course. Her mother had pre-ordered a special menu for the occasion, a selection of the

graduate's favourite dishes.

Katherine looked forward to this evening, she had been completely absorbed getting ready for exams and had missed all the usual family dinners since Easter. Now she had the opportunity to catch up with the family news, alas, there was meddling Aunt Martha to contend with, she had the most annoying habit of asking those trying questions that rubbed everyone the wrong way at the most inopportune moment, usually putting her large foot in her mouth, inquiring about situations and events that they would rather not discuss and preferred to keep private. The customary questioning began as the waiters served the first course.

"It is so nice to meet you, Jennifer. How long have you known our Steven?" she asked as she intently scrutinized the guest.

"Oh, just about three weeks now, we met at an end of term party thrown by some of the students at MIT," Jennifer replied, unaware she was being reeled in by the overcurious Aunt Martha to reveal her personal details. Steven looked a little unnerved, wondering where the conversation would lead and if it would last long.

"Is that so, dear? Do you also attend MIT?"

"No, I am actually studying at Harvard," she replied.

"How interesting! What are you studying, may I ask?"

"Molecular Biology."

Imagine that, Katherine thought, perhaps she's not as flighty as she looks.

"How wonderful," Aunt Martha continued, "well I am glad that our Steven has finally found someone who shares his interests."

Martha, with her well-meaning interrogations, had no idea how tactless she could be at times to the discomfort of those around her. Despite his genius, Steven's wilful inability to remain steady with anyone for long, in addition to his spendthrift recklessness and his love for fast cars, (Porsches to be exact), was a cause of great concern to their parents. Fortunately, he and Jennifer were quickly released from her Inquisition as Aunt Martha selected her next victim for inspection.

"Have you found a serious beau yet, Kathy dear?" Aunt Martha dutifully enquired with that exasperating wheedlesome tone, "I know a lady at my bridge club who has a charming son with a stock brokerage company who would love to meet you...."

Oh, here we go again! Katherine tried to politely evade this prying conversation. When will Aunt Martha learn to keep her nose out of other people's business?

"That sounds very nice, Aunt Martha, I'll have to think about that...."

"Yes, do dear. It's high time you think about settling down with a nice young man and get a family started," she persisted as she peered through her large

rainbow rimmed glasses.

Why can't she be quiet for once and enjoy her food? "Er, well, perhaps one day, but right now I plan to concentrate on my artwork."

Truthfully, Katherine had not seriously considered 'settling down' in the traditional sense of marriage, home, two kids and a dog the minute she left college. This was the 90s for heaven's sake! She never agreed with the 'old school' thinking that girls were sent to Ivy League colleges simply to meet some eligible catch. She was enjoying her independence and just beginning to find her feet. Right now, she was quite happy with thoughts of working on her projects and her plans to open a gallery someday soon, and could not imagine being tied down to that lifestyle, at least not yet. She had never really fallen in love with anyone beyond a schoolgirl crush, and therefore the thought of living with someone on that intimate level was an alien concept. Imagine inviting a complete stranger into your life! In fact, she was quite wary of allowing anyone of the opposite gender get too close, for she seemed to attract the strangest individuals who became a regular pain in the neck and made her uncomfortable. There was the 'greasy bean-pole' in high school covered in a minefield of zits, 'Stammer Sam' who followed her everywhere in the halls between classes like a lovesick puppy. When she did meet someone who seemed nice, one had to be careful, she observed many of her peers were dating simply for the sake of dating and having a 'good time', which could only lead to trouble, in Katherine's opinion. Once, she overheard two jocks mouthing off with masculine bravado about their various conquests, and declaring how lucky that son-of-a-gun would be who could 'nab' Katherine Walsingham. So, she with her fortune was an object to be used, not a person to be respected! Although she knew most teenagers at school had only 'one thing on their minds', this public affirmation by those two morons disgusted her. Her ideals of love gleaned from Victorian novels remained behind an invisible blockade from that moment, a wall protecting her from romantic disillusionment. *Anything past friendship, and I'm outta here.* Better to be safe than sorry! Why does Aunt Martha have to keep bringing this up?

Katherine's mother, breaking off a conversation about the latest society gossip with chatterbox Barbara, relaying the details about the Thorntons who may be getting a divorce; "He went off with the receptionist at his shrink's office, you know," graciously came to the rescue as she usually did when Aunt Martha poked too deep into their private affairs.

"Why Martha, Katherine has plenty of time to think about that. Indeed, she will be going to Paris in a few months, and may be opening her own gallery when she returns home."

Whew! Thanks Mom, Katherine thought with a sigh of relief, with Aunt Martha's curiosity peaked over her career plans, she could relax a bit. Perhaps now

we can enjoy our dinner.

“Oh yes, Kathy, that’s right. You’ll be staying at the Kraylors’ apartment. Well, won’t that be nice? Not far from the Eiffel Tower, I believe,” Aunt Martha prompted, turning to Charles for his input.

“Yes, that’s right. It has a lovely view of the tower. My parents bought it a few years ago,” Charles replied. “They are only too happy to let Kathy stay there. My parents and I will be going for Christmas and the New Year, and then we will all return together mid January.”

“Sorry I won’t be home for Christmas, but I am curious to see how they celebrate in France,” Katherine added. “I came home for the holidays that term I spent there, and missed the experience.”

“Well, Kathy, what will you be doing there all those months alone in Paris...?”, Aunt Martha asked, suddenly eyeing the two youngsters with interest.

“Mostly loitering in the art museums and admiring the paintings, it’s amazing to study the brush strokes of a work. A photograph can never do justice to the actual canvas,” Katherine replied, “I may just paint a thing or two myself while I’m there. Can you imagine, they actually let people into the Louvre with their art equipment and allow them to copy the paintings? At least they have security. Wouldn’t it be funny if they didn’t, and someone switched paintings, passing off their copies as originals and getting away with it?”

“Imagine that,” Suzy said, “I am surprised, you would think the museum authorities would be afraid there could be an accident and an original masterpiece become splotted with paint.”

That’s if they are originals,” cousin Jon remarked, “there’s a rumour that the paintings in the public areas aren’t real, they’re locked away for safekeeping.”

“If that’s true, at least they can’t be snatched or destroyed by stray paint splatters,” Suzy replied, “but it’s disappointing to think the paintings may be fake.”

“Well, I hope the Kraylors will not mind any blotches,” Steves interjected with a grin, “At least Kats is not interested in that strange medium dignified by the term ‘performance art’ and won’t be throwing pots of paint around their apartment or howling like a baboon.”

“I should hope not, Steves! If I ever experiment with that idea, please get me a straitjacket and march me to Belleview. I could officially be declared insane,” Katherine replied as everyone laughed. “And please assure your parents, Charlie, that I will be very careful, I’ll have plenty of drop sheets on hand so they won’t need to fret.”

“No worries there, Kathy. By the way, I heard about your painting for the contest, I can’t wait to see what you come up with next,” Charles replied with a smile.

“Ditto!” Steves added with his usual mischievous grin, “probably something portraying ‘Save the Kolas’, or ‘Help the Hippos’.”

“Very funny,” Katherine replied with a resigned sigh, quite accustomed to her brother’s teasing, “and what are you up to lately, Mr. Brains? Thinking up plans to achieve world domination?”

“Nothing that ambitious, not yet anyway, just a new medication to ease the symptoms of the common cold.”

“That is important,” Suzy returned, “no one likes to be sick. It’s a pity that you can’t discover a cure.”

“What makes you think I haven’t tried?” he mused, suddenly assuming his hard-to-listen-to scientific mode. “The problem lies with the fact a cold is not one malady caused by one virus, but the same or similar symptoms induced by one of a hundred viruses, and then there are several different strains for each virus. In fact, only a few years ago, scientists using X-ray crystallography on one of the common strains found it had a high degree of antigenic variability...”

“I am afraid you’ve lost me,” Aunt Martha interjected.

“Me too,” Suzy added.

“Oh, he’s always losing us,” cousin William confirmed with a chuckle, “anything that comes out of his mouth that’s not a joke sounds like brain surgery.”

“It means that producing a vaccine is not viable,” Steves replied a little frustrated with their lack of comprehension. “So all we can do is treat the symptoms. At least a cold does not last forever, but they are a right inconvenience when you catch one, which reminds me, I should have the formula ready soon, Pops,” Steves said as he turned to his father who had finished speaking about the latest stock results with the other men, “but make sure the lab technicians run through and check the patents and all the other usual legalities, I wouldn’t want to find that I have come up with something that has already been developed and end up with a lawsuit.”

“What! And deprive me of a defence case?” Charles laughed.

“I thought you were concentrating on your exams this spring? Were you working on this when you should have been studying? I thought I told you to wait on this,” Harold replied to his precocious son in a satirical tone.

“Now, now, leave the chap alone,” Gramps interjected with good humour, “the young man can pass his exams on what flies over his head in the lectures halls. His grades are top notch, so don’t complain if he spends his free time with some extra projects.”

When the dishes were cleared, a refreshing lemon sorbet was served before the main course arrived, châteaubriand. The evening continued rather pleasantly, for the most part. The men engaged in their usual conversations on business, politics and sports. The women were occupied with the latest bridge tournaments,

the upcoming social events, the juiciest gossip. Aunt Martha was only too obliging with her regular topics ranging from the latest styles in summer wear at their favourite shopping haunts to so-and-so's hysterectomy, which perhaps was not the best topic over a medium rare steak, before she turned to Jennifer and attempted to extract more information. Katherine was happy to catch up on the latest news with Steves, her cousins and Charlie as their lives had become extremely busy in their various pursuits. Jon was at Columbia University studying to become a cardiovascular specialist, while Stephanie had decided she would try fashion photography and attended school in Boston, which fascinated Susanna who loved reading the fashion magazines and studying the photographs. William was still in high school but had already decided he would delve into the world of computers, perhaps software programming, much to Steve's approval. Charlie, Katherine's long time friend, was locked in a major case between two recording companies and their songwriters who were disputing copyright issues over the music and lyrics of an album, he did not have the time to visit as often.

"I know you can't discuss particulars, but how is the case coming along?" Katherine asked. "Are you enjoying the legal profession?"

"I knew the practise of law could be a little trying, please forgive the pun," Charlie replied as he sipped his wine, "but I find setting up the circumstances of a case like this for a jury is the most frustrating part. Copyright issues generally boil down to the originality of a piece and who came up with it first, and therefore who should be entitled to ownership."

"Well, that's understandable, but what do you have to explain to the jury?"

"The problem is proving whether an infringement of copyright was intentional or not. Many who are selected for jury duty know next to nothing about the basics of music, and you have to place reasonable doubt in their minds concerning the extent of the originality of a song. Of course, stolen lyrics are easy to identify, but melody and rhythms are more difficult to pinpoint." Charlie had learned how to play the guitar, and had almost succeeded in forming a band in high school, therefore he was familiar with the technicalities of composition.

"I am sorry to say I hold a similar position. I like musicals, and although I had a two-week introduction to the violin when I was six, and joined the high school choir, I never had formal music lessons. How would you begin?" Katherine wondered aloud.

Although this was annoying in court, Charlie found he enjoyed sharing his skill in legal argument with her.

"Try to picture a piano," he began. "Do you know how to form a scale?"

"Yes, the only one I know is C major, which is all the white notes, beginning from C of course."

"Well, despite the length of the keyboard, there are only twelve notes

available to a composer. Lets take your scale of C major, that is, from middle C to the next C above, the seven white notes, with the five black notes in between. That's basically what a composer has to work with."

"Okay, but surely the rest of the board must matter? And what about the other scales?"

"If you play the same seven note scale on any C-note you choose, either below the range mentioned, or above, it is still the same. It just sounds 'deeper' in the lower left section, and 'higher' as you proceed further to the right. The other scales, or keys, are also the same scale, but higher or lower in pitch. The key of D major, the next note up from C, sounds exactly the same as C major, but higher in tone." Katherine was looking puzzled until he offered an example. "Just try singing *Happy Birthday* on the same note you start 'Do, a deer, a female deer,' and then sing the exact same thing on the note for 'Re, a drop of golden sun'. Same sounds, but higher in pitch." Katherine quietly hummed the first line of *Happy Birthday* in the manner he suggested, carefully trying to keep 'doh' and 're' separate.

"Well, that's easy to understand. So, you would argue it is probable that a composer could accidentally write something similar to another composer, as they would have the same twelve notes to work with."

"Brava my dear! I wish I had you on the jury," Charlie beamed. "Then, proving that a song is original is made difficult by the fact most of the songs for decades have followed the popular 'lyric-chorus-lyric-chorus-instrumental improvisation-lyric-chorus' pattern before the song concludes," he continued. "The melody for the lyrics and chorus are rather short, usually four, eight, or perhaps sixteen lines, so it is possible that a songwriter will accidentally compose a song that resembles one already written."

"Yes, I guess it wouldn't be difficult for a songwriter to write something in a style he likes to listen to, and then find his piece sounds close to something already released." Katherine concluded. "Like you say, it comes down to whether or not a piece was plagiarised, bears an unintentional resemblance, or maybe was composed as a tribute piece and mistaken for property theft."

"Exactly! You catch on fast. Maybe you should have gone to law school and joined us at Kraylor and Kraylor?" Charlie laughed.

"No thank you! I don't know if I could live through the stress of court battles. Red paint I can handle, but not red tape," Katherine joked, "but why do you find that explanation so frustrating? With your example, I could see your argument clearly."

"Aha, this is where the detested red tape enters the scene. Even though I could explain the matter clearly, music is my hobby, but for court you need a professional to demonstrate this principle to make your argument convincing. So,

I have to call up a well known composer or a licensed music teacher to testify and give them the run-through in court. ‘Now Mr. Whatever, could you please explain to the jury how a scale is constructed?’, ‘Would you agree a composer has only twelve notes to work with?’, etcetera, etcetera,” Charlie iterated, marking off his questions to the witness on his fingers in a mock exasperated tone.

“I see, and you can’t ask the jury if they understand everything and wait for their response like you can right now with me. You have to cross your fingers and hope that your questioning of the witness was sufficient....”

“Bingo! And that does not include the cross examination of your witness by the other side. See the frustration for such a simple argument? Sometimes I wish I was a prosecutor, if I had to try and wrangle some answers from a criminal who was trying to hide evidence, *that* would be a test,” Charlie mused.

“Oh, you’re a right Sherlock Holmes! Soon, you won’t accept anything unless it challenges your intellect.”

“Okay, I confess, I read too much Conan Doyle. I must admit though, I did learn a thing or two from Holmes. Speaking of copyright, did you know that song by Phil Collins, *A Groovy Kind of Love*, was heavily borrowed from a piano sonata written by a classical composer named Muzio Clementi who died in the late 1800s?”

“You’re joking.”

“I jest not. And, that song was written in 1965.”

“Well, who would have guessed.”

A raspberry sorbet was served before the last course was brought to the table, a chocolate *crème* gateaux prepared by the chef and decorated with an edible portrait of Katherine traced in icing encircled with exquisite red sugary roses, served with French vanilla ice cream, a speciality of the house prepared according to their own secret recipe, and of course, rounded off with French roast coffee. Suzy manned the camera as Katherine tried to cut the first slice, chuckling as she hesitated.

“It’s too beautiful to cut! I feel like I’m chopping my nose off, or something,” she laughed, not knowing where she should place the knife in the gastronomic artwork.

“We all love you so much, we could eat you up,” Steves added from across the table.

“Here, here!” Gramps replied merrily.

Katherine finally made the first cut, and the cake was taken away to be served. Suzy busily clicked away with the camera while the waiter dutifully enquired if they had enjoyed their meal, and Katherine’s father answered for everyone; “A suburb dinner, please convey our compliments to the chef.”

“Okay Suzy, we don’t want you left out! Could you take a few pictures for

us?” Katherine asked the waiter, who graciously assented, quickly examining the top of the camera to find the correct button, allowing Suzy time to return to her seat.

“Certanlee Mademoiselle! Okaee, one, two three...zay ‘zneeze’!” Everyone smiled at his French accent, while the waiter continued to take additional shots of everyone, “Zhere, ‘Cheeze’, ‘Sneeze’, works everee time,” the waiter bowed, “Now you weell have photographs with happee faces.” Handing the camera back to Suzy, he concluded, “Enjoeoe your deszert.”

“That’s a nice young man,” Aunt Martha said.

After the dessert plates had been cleared, two waiters approached with a side table piled with beautifully decorated gift boxes covered in bright wrappings and oversized bows, presents for the graduate. Before the big day, her parents wanted to buy her something very special for her graduation, and said that they were thinking of replacing her car, which was now over four years old. Katherine, however, was not like Steves who itched to own the latest models, and was quite happy with her white BMW and its cream leather upholstery. She did not think it was necessary to exchange it yet as it behaved perfectly, and besides, it did not seem practical when she would be away for months in Paris. In the end, her parents agreed they would talk about a new car when she came home in the new year, or perhaps help her with her gallery, whichever she preferred. However, they still wished to mark the occasion with gifts, and so Pops had selected a beautiful rose mahogany art case complete with Victorian brass fixtures for her paint tubes and brushes, which she really loved.

“As you say, they allow artists bring their equipment into the museums, and we couldn’t have you take your old contraption out in public, especially to the Louvre,” he said with a smile. On her outings, Katherine used an old battered pine wood art case that looked as though it had been dragged through a world war waged with paint-ball artillery. “Perhaps now we can finally have a funeral and bury it?”

“Pops! It’s exquisite! Thank you so much! I shall definitely try to be more careful with this one, let’s pray I don’t drop it.” How am I going to keep it clean, she thought!

Her mother’s gift was too bulky to bring to the dinner.

“I found delightful matching luggage for your trip, dear. You know those cases with the tapestry designs in the dusty rose colours? They’re waiting for you at home,” her mother said, “I hope you will like them.”

“Of course I will, I can’t wait to see them! Thank you, Mom,” Katherine replied.

Gramps had found a gorgeous gold brooch at Tiffany’s that he knew she would like.

“Gramps! How did you know I like emeralds?”

“Oh, I did a little investigating,” he smiled, “nothing escapes your mother you know.”

“Thank you! It matches my ring. I didn’t have a brooch to go with it.”

She was a little apprehensive opening Steve’s gift and carefully lifted the lid, she never knew what to expect. One birthday, it was the box-within-a-box-within-a-box trick, or that Christmas when he ‘mummified’ everyone’s gifts with toilet paper before he used wrapping paper. And, she could never forget that Easter he dyed the marshmallows with edible crazy-ink that stained their teeth and they couldn’t open their mouths at church. Opening the box, she was surprised to find he had given her a sparkling Waterford crystal atomizer filled with her favourite perfume.

“He told me what he did to your last one,” Jennifer explained, “I said it was high time he made amends. I got the perfume.”

When they were younger, Steves had experimented with his chemistry set and decided it would be great fun to switch her perfume with a stink bomb, which made her smell like a skunk for the day, and could never be completely washed out of her old atomizer. How she wished she could have lost him somewhere that time! Katherine was beginning to like Jennifer, and hoped Steves would make a go of this relationship, at least for a little longer than the rest. She certainly can bring out the best in him.

“Thank you Steves, thank you Jennifer! How lovely!”

Uncle Tim and Aunt Barbara’s gift was a large colour-plate, special edition of Renoir’s life and works, a volume that Katherine did not have in her collection, while the cousins selected a large edition of Leonardo da Vinci. Aunt Martha had found a lustrous, perfectly matched double strand of natural shell-pink pearls.

“I could not decide what to get, but when I saw these, I thought how perfect they would be for you. Pink is your colour, Kathy.”

That was Aunt Martha, if one could overlook her prying curiosity and meddlesome habits, she had a soft heart, and always available when needed in times of family crises, someone you could turn to for help, and could always be trusted to find that perfect gift.

“I am so overwhelmed with all these beautiful presents,” she said as she reached for a gold envelope sent by the Kraylors, a deluxe gift certificate of two tickets to any show of her choice on Broadway. Charlie also brought her a present, a gold charm, a new addition for her bracelet, featuring a palette and brushes with tiny little gemstones for the paint colours. Since he discovered she had a ‘thing’ for dangly charms, it became a tradition to present a new one for her collection on special occasions. Suzy, in the hunt for something unusual, found a blue satin covered box in Chinatown filled with soft, short-handled wolf-hair

brushes that tapered to a long fine point and fit easily into the palm of her hand.

Delighted with all these thoughtful gifts, Katherine thanked everyone once again, and the evening was happily rounded off with petite forest green after diner mints and extra coffee, casual conversations and Steve's side-splitting yarns before it was finally time to call it a night. At the reception area, Charlie turned to Katherine as he helped her carry the gifts.

"Kathy, I'm free this Saturday. Can we get together and do something? We also have that tennis rematch we never got around to."

"That's right. Suzy will be driving back to Iowa on Friday, I think Steves will be busy with Jennifer before she goes back to Massachusetts Saturday afternoon, and I have no plans. Okay, how about ... ten Saturday morning, and then we can have lunch afterwards? I warn you, I shall give you no quarter this time," she replied with a smile.

"It's set then."



Charlie arrived a little before the appointed time at Oak Meadows all ready for the morning's tennis battle, with sports bag in tow, he rang the bell and Mrs. Gonzales, the housekeeper, opened the door with her usual greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Charlie, looking for Miss Kathy? She hasn't come down yet. Mrs. Walsingham is in the breakfast room."

"Thank you, I'll pop in and say hello."

"Shall I bring you some coffee while you wait, or perhaps something else? Juice maybe?"

"Some coffee would hit the spot, if you don't mind. I was up late last night with a demanding client, and could use some fuel before I face the Racket Whiz."

Making his way down the white wainscoted checker-tiled hall, he entered the breakfast room and greeted Mrs. Walsingham seated at her card table by the window playing Patience. She was enjoying her tea and bran muffins topped with marmalade before she went to town for the day.

"Hello Charlie. I see you are here for that rematch."

"It's about time. We've got to break that tied score sometime."

"Kathy should be down shortly, I think she is looking for her visor, it is bright today, isn't it?"

"Sure is. I am glad we are playing this morning, I wouldn't like to be running about in the afternoon if it hits the high temperatures they predict."

"That's sensible.. Would you like a muffin, dear? They were freshly baked this morning."

"Thanks, they look good. I overslept and missed breakfast."

"Charlie, you know you shouldn't, it's the most important meal of the day."

"I know I shouldn't, but there you go ... and here's Mrs. Gonzales with her much needed cup of coffee. Thank you," he said as he helped her with the tray.

"Wouldn't you like something more substantial, some eggs and bacon perhaps?"

"No, Mrs. W., the muffin is fine, thanks. By the way, where is the famous painting? I'd love to see what caused all the fuss."

"Well, we have placed it in the library for now. We don't want to upset Kathy, but we really have no idea where to hang it. Shall we say, it is a subject that may be controversial to some. Hard to know how to handle it, actually. Beautiful to look at, but you know our Kathy and her ideas, she tends to get carried away at times."

"Is it *that* provocative? Well, I guess I shall have to take a look at it."

"By all means, Charlie. It's on the table to the left."

Leaving his bag and his half finished muffin and coffee, he headed towards the library across the hall. Locating the picture, he gently picked it up and leaned it against one of the dark wood bookshelves lining the wall, stroking his chin as he studied the unusual scene. I can understand Mrs. W.'s indecision, this certainly would be a conversation piece wherever they hang it!

"Hello, Charlie, Mom said I would find you here. Sorry I took so long, but I couldn't remember where I put my visor."

How charming she looked in her white tennis outfit!

"Good morning Kathy, I had to view the enigmatic wonder."

"What do you think? I might as well hear the critique now, and get it over with," she joked.

"The picture is executed with great skill Kathy, it really is a work of art, the subject is daring, and the lighting, shading, the figures, the brushstrokes, it is splendid..." he declared with approval.

"But..." she gently prodded, waiting to hear the worst.

"But, it's so ... so, *cynical*, Kathy. It is a very mordant view of life. If you don't mind me asking, what possible experience could make you view the world from this sceptical aspect? I understand your treatment of the theme for the contest, and yes, mankind fails all the time, but I didn't know you were so ... philosophical," he replied, trying not to offend her. On the contrary, she was not offended. She could always share her innermost thoughts with Charlie and she appreciated his opinions. He was not one to indulge in flattery, and his assessments were always sincere.

"You know, the real inspiration was drawn from a sleepover at a friend's house during high school," Katherine began, "you remember Jackie Silmore, don't you? It was her sixteenth birthday party, actually."

"How did you get from a sleepover to the destruction of the world, Kathy?" he asked, a little bemused by her answer, trying to unravel the correlation between the two situations.

"Well, we all wanted to watch an Indiana Jones movie, and Jackie accidentally picked the wrong tape, a movie she recorded from TV. We watched the first fifteen minutes before everyone started to voice their complaints, and she ejected it, but I saw enough of it to make me curious. It was *Soylent Green*, with Charlton Heston. I had never seen it before, and I wished we had continued watching it. Have you seen it?"

"No, can't say that I have. I've heard of it, a science fiction flick," he deduced.

"It is, and a truly disturbing one at that. I couldn't get the first scenes out of my head that night, and so I crept down the next morning to get a bowl of cereal and watch the movie before anyone woke up. Let me tell you, that film was a revelation. Imagine that we are several decades in the future, and due to our mismanagement of the earth, our social structure and global ecosystem are in a state of chaos. The earth is so polluted that the sky is dark and discoloured, the sun can no longer be seen, and green foliage and trees are nearly extinct. The greenhouse effect has become intolerable and winter never occurs. Farmed food, forget about organic produce, is a luxury as nothing will grow outside a strictly controlled environment. Real food, down to a jar of jelly, is only available to the rich as they are the only ones able to afford it, and armed guards patrol farms walled up like prisons. To keep the impoverished overpopulated masses alive, a company called Soylent distributes these horrible green processed rations Socialist-style, which they claim are made from ocean plankton, supposedly the only wildlife left on earth. To secure the survival of the human race, the government has become Socialist and manages the population according to rank and position, and assigns housing and food accordingly. The homeless have become numberless and literally crowd the streets, sleeping right on top of each other at night on the pavements. The world is depicted as hell on earth."

"That really is a bleak, dystopian picture, but where does Charlton Heston come into all of this?"

"It's been a while since I saw the movie. If I remember correctly, he plays a police officer in New York. Since he is a city official, he is fortunate to have a dilapidated apartment, which he shares with an old man, who I think was supposed to be a professor at one time. Remember that actor who was in those old gangster movies, Edward ... Edward..." Kathy hesitated trying to recall his

name.

“You mean Edward G. Robinson?”

“Yes, that’s him. He played the old man. Well, one of the wealthy Soylent company directors is found murdered in his penthouse, and Heston is called in to investigate. Instead of showing any interest in the case, he rifles the man’s refrigerator, an appliance that is now a luxury, and he steals some of his ‘real’ food, another luxury, a steak, lettuce and tomatoes I think, and shares them with the old man. In the end, they weep over their dinner, and Robinson wonders how on earth did they allow the world to get this bad. Apparently, he works at the library, and is surrounded by books that record what the planet once looked like.”

“Well, that movie would provide food for thought, I can see that,” he concurred.

“But wait, that’s not the end of it, Charlie. It gets worse. Heston finally works on the investigation and brings home some data he collected so Robinson can look into it for him, company records or scientific information from Soylent that the director was going to make public before he was killed. Well, what the old man discovers shocks him so much that he decides he cannot handle his situation any longer, and he declares he ‘wants to go home’. At first, you don’t know what he means until you see him arrive at an ominous looking building that looks like a protected research facility. It turns out to be a government operated euthanasia centre. The medical faculty make him comfortable, ask him what music he likes and what his favourite colour is. In his last moments, he is shown a movie on a large screen of how the earth once looked with green hills, animals, forests and blue lakes accompanied by his selected soundtrack, and the room is all lit up in his chosen colour. Heston arrives too late to save his friend, but just in time to see this panoramic film and to hear his last words, urging him to disclose the truth to everyone. In the end, Heston follows his body to find that the cadavers at the facility are collected by dump trucks and then delivered to Soylent—the rations were manufactured from human remains.”

“That’s gruesome, Kathy. A nightmarish situation. But aren’t you taking that story too much to heart? Surely, the planet will never get that bad? You know how they over emphasize things in Hollywood, display everything over the top, and it’s bound to sell.”

“I know, and there were other details in the movie too upsetting to watch, but I can see it beginning to happen all around us. Can’t you see it too, Charlie? I’m still trying to get my head around it all. For instance, the planet is slowly being poisoned, and anything that is organic and naturally grown without the use of modern methods is more expensive than other produce. Who knows what will happen to the food once they succeed in genetically modifying it for the market? Who knows what will happen to everyone after eating it for years? What if we

alter the ecosystem and damage it irreparably, wiping out our food supply? No one has looked that far ahead, because no one can foresee the outcome until it actually happens.”

“Except, perhaps, for the people who wrote the story for *Soylent Green*,” Charlie mused.

“You said it! Haven’t you noticed that everyone has a ‘We’ll-deal-with-it-when-we-get-to-it’ attitude? In the end, caution is thrown to the wind. Scientists now do things because they can, and have no concern for the long-term consequences of introducing modified produce. Who knows how much more is actually hidden from the public? Do you think the government tells us everything? Certainly not, in my opinion. It’s scary to think that this food crisis is only one of the issues presented in the movie.”

“Well, I don’t think the human race will ever get to the point of eating itself *en masse*,” Charlie replied, “although I can’t say anything about the head-hunter countries. Somehow, I can’t see us packaged on supermarket shelves in the near future.”

“We’re closer to it than you think, from what Steves and Jennifer tell me, there is talk of inserting human genes into animals for medical purposes, so that organs for transplants can be taken from animal donors that won’t be rejected by human recipients. That sounds like a great philanthropic breakthrough, but there’s no mention of what could happen afterwards. People always make mistakes, and you can’t be sure that those modified animals won’t get mingled with the agricultural system eventually. What if we end up eating meat or drinking milk that contain human genes, and never know it? Every time someone says, ‘That will never happen,’ it usually does.”

Charles felt the coffee and muffin churn in his stomach as she finished this unsettling statement.

“Kathy, you’re ruining what little breakfast I got this morning,” he replied with a sheepish grin.

“Well, it’s your fault you got me started on this subject! I could go on for an hour, but I guess we had better get to the game before we become utterly morose for the day, or it gets too hot. Let’s have some fun. Besides, I need the exercise and so do you. I’ve been sitting at my books or the easel for too long and you spend most of your time sitting behind a desk. This will do us both some good.”

“Okay, let me get my bag from the breakfast room, I got new rackets last month, you can try them out if you like.”

“Thanks, just for the first set, I wouldn’t want to scratch them up before you get to use them. Let’s be on our way then.”

The next morning, Katherine was stiff from the previous day's exertion, aching in places that had not registered pain in a long time. Drowsily getting ready and dressing in her Sunday best, she made her way down to the breakfast room. How she would love to sleep in today, but that was not an option. One Sunday morning during their early teens, Katherine and Steven decided to assert their desire for independence and declared with a passive lie-in protest they did not feel like going to church. The protest was quickly halted as their father stood in each doorway and quietly declared in his steeled business tone that made board members quake:

"When you have homes of your own, you may live as you choose, but while you are under my roof, you shall go to church."

They quickly hopped out of bed and never complained again. Unless it was a dire circumstance, their parents never used corporal punishment, one chilly look from their father was enough to inform them when they had crossed that line and were courting a long period of house arrest or the revoking of certain privileges. Respect was demanded and returned when earned.

Making her way downstairs to the breakfast room, she greeted her parents who were relaxing with their Sunday papers and discussing the news of the day.

"Morning, Pops. Morning, Mom."

"Good morning, Kathy," her father replied. "How did the game go yesterday?"

She had gone to bed early the night before and did not see her father who had come home late after a protracted business conference preparing for Wednesday's board meeting.

"Tied again, wouldn't you know it? Charlie won the first set, I won the second, and then it got too hot to play the third, so it stands as before, well, almost. I think I ache more than last time! I'm so out of shape, it's been a while since I played a hard game like that," Katherine said as she sat down gingerly in her customary place across from her mother and helped herself to some coffee, waffles and bacon.

"Maybe you should soak in the hot tub when we come home? You will feel better," her mother suggested.

"That sounds good, I might do that. Let's pray the Reverend won't preach for too long today. My back won't handle it. Hey Pops, can I have the Art and Cultural section?"

"Of course Kathy, here you are."

Her father handed her the desired section already taken out and neatly folded. He had learned long ago if he wished to read his section of the paper in

peace, and in one piece, he should remove the sought after sections. Steve's sports and technology sections were also neatly folded and placed to the side.

"Kathy, look and see if anything is mentioned about the Sirrac contest, there wasn't anything in the daily papers the last few days, and this doesn't seem to have anything either," her mother said as she flipped through her paper one last time. "I was sure that someone would write an article about it."

"Perhaps the editors decided it just wasn't newsworthy this year. Or, they're going to wait and write their articles when the winning piece is exhibited at the gallery," Katherine replied as she thumbed through the pages her father had passed to her. She was surprised, however, when she discovered an article in the exhibition reviews. "Sorry, got it, just found something."

"Well, let's hear it. Read it out, dear."

"Oh no, it's by the 'Art Hacker'," Katherine groaned in dismay, "I'll have to wear a paper bag over my head when I go out from now on!"

"Who?"

"Robert Horace, critic *extraordinaire*, better known to dismayed artists far and wide as the 'Art Hacker', or 'Robert the Horrible'," she explained, "he nearly always slashes a piece he reviews, or every exhibition he attends, not that many deserve a good review, but he also discredits really good works. I guess the editor believes bad publicity is a good thing for the art columns."

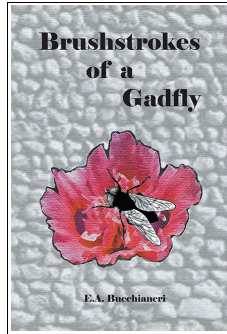
"Come, come now Kathy, it can't be all that bad," her father said reassuringly.

"Pretty much! Just listen to this; ...

The End, of the Free Text Preview.

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